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ABSTRACT

One perspective for literary analysis assumes certain divisions of language, grammar, and "worlds of discourse." The worlds that language can express are the phenomenal, extensional, intensional, and alternate systems. Within these contexts, certain linguistic features universally affect responses to the world created and the language used. One set of text perceptions exists in an environment of alternate worlds, which combine extensional assumptions about the phenomenal world (acceptable truth values) with the intensional conceptualizations of metatheories about either extensional or other intensional worlds (debatable truth values). These alternate worlds are recognized through the "implicit context" created by the expressions "I imagine (myself in) and invite you to conceive a world in which . . .," and "I believe (or prefer) a world in which . . ." Such text perceptions help to create the literature of a culture; but those texts referring to known but not preferred alternate worlds should be considered secondary literary texts, while texts which are both known and preferred should be considered the primary texts of a culture. With the acceptance of these situations, the study of literary language can take two directions: the description and explanation of how linguistic structures refer to alternate worlds; and the description of alternate value systems and their functions as sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic phenomena. (RL)

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The Pragmatics of Literary Language

Recently, there has been a general condemnation of a research program which seeks to describe the special linguistic features of literary language (Ellis: p. 50, Pratt: p. xxii). There can be little doubt that this empiricist notion--that certain linguistic features can universally affect an aesthetic response--has been an impediment to the growth of our knowledge about literature. However, students of literature are still left with the interesting fact that most, if not all, societies recognize and conserve a select body of works which are venerated as the "literature of that society" (Hockett: p. 554), and this apparent culture-universal provides the literary analyst with data which surely invites explanation.

At present, such an explanation is problematic because on the one hand, the analyst must account for the obvious fact that members of a culture can easily recognize their literature, while on the other, he must avoid the empiricist trap created by deviational theories of literary language. This dilemma may be resolved by considering some hypotheses from value theory (Rescher: pp. 49-60) coupled

with some recent literary applications of modal logic (Ecco, 1978a, 1979b; Levin, 1977). However, let me hasten to add that my goal here is not to make an ad hoc appropriation of theory from other disciplines but to develop a coherent theoretical paradigm which will facilitate the observation, description and explanation of literary data.

To begin, let us assume that our knowledge of the phenomenal world is constrained by our systems of knowledge and belief. Let us consider these systems of knowledge and belief as possible worlds. The notion of possible worlds has a long and venerated tradition descending from Leibniz, and currently, the term is often used by logicians to refer to ways in which the world could have been (Allwood, et. al.: p. 22). I will extend this definition a bit to include not only the ways in which the world could have been but also the way in which the world is, or seems to be. In other words, the notion of possible worlds allows us to account for the obvious fact that we can perceive the world as it is while conceiving it as something else.

Now, let us also assume as does Siegried Schmidt (pp. 164-5) that any wellformed text must constitute some possible world or system of possible worlds. The cognitive propensity which enables the subject to recognize a possible world is the encyclopedia (Ecco, 1979: pp. 585-591). The encyclopedia is considered here as an abstract mechanism which specifies the constraints on a possible world. Furthermore, there are two aspects of the encyclopedia which

for the sake of convenience, I will refer to as Encyclopedia I (EI) and Encyclopedia II (EII). Encyclopedia II is the mechanism which constrains the range of possible worlds for the individual subject, and Encyclopedia I is the mechanism which constrains all words for all subjects. Encyclopedia II is culture-specific while Encyclopedia I is species-specific. If we were to characterize these mechanisms through an analogy with transformational/generative theory, we could propose that

1) Encyclopedia I : Encyclopedia II ::
   Universal Grammar : Competence for a natural language

Concise examples which demonstrate the reality of EII are not immediately abundant, but it would seem that they are to be found in the areas of cultural universals and differentiation--both linguistic and conceptual (Osgood: pp. 271-335). However, there are some readily available examples which indicate how EI works to govern world-construction and perception. For example, utterances (2-5) refer to worlds which are anomalous in varying degrees.

2) Green furiously ideas sleep colorless.
3) When your mind is not dwelling on the dualism of good and evil, what is your original face before you were born?
4) Why is a feel oyster an egg stir
5) The Venusian lizards chatted idly in an alley in Cleveland.

Unfortunately, there is not time here to specify the world-construction constraints violated by utterances (2-5), but it may be possible to set the stage for their explanation by considering the categories which constitute EI. These are the alternate, the intensional and the extensional worlds.

The extensional world is the one which we take for granted. It would be the world that I am referring to when I point around me and say "this room." An extensional world is analogous to Frege's idea of bedeutung (reference), but it differs in the following respects. First, an extensional world will contain both extensional and intensional expressions like stone and unicorn (Frege, 1952: pp. 56-78; Allwood: 126n), and second, it will contain terms which also refer to alternate and intensional worlds.

An intensional world is one which is used to conceptualize either an extensional world or another intensional world. If we allow that our knowledge of a particular extensional world represents a theory of the phenomenal world, then an intensional world which conceptualizes an extensional world is a metatheory of the phenomenal world, and an intensional world which conceptualizes another intensional world is a metametatheory and so on. The basic difference between an extensional world and an intensional world is that the extensional world (EW) determines the truth--values of propositions which purport to refer to the phenomenal world while the intensional world (IW) determines the truth--values of propositions which refer to EW.

What this means, among other things, is that we would all take for granted the truth of proposition (6).

6) A man is in this room.

However, if we were to change (6) to

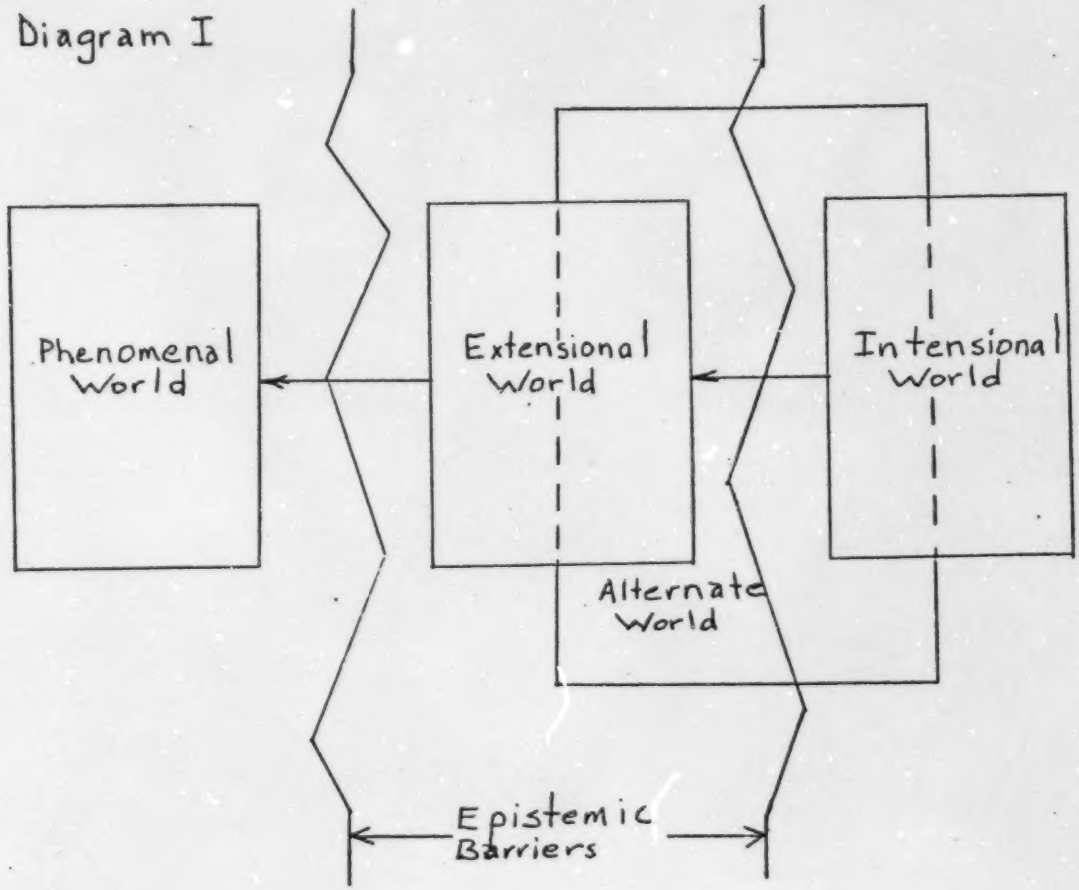
7) A man who has the solution to our present economic crisis is in the room.

we would assume that this is a conjecture, the truth of which can only be decided by an intensional world which would define the term economic crisis and which would also specify a legitimate solution to one. Only after possessing the knowledge of, and possibly the belief in, this intensional world would we be willing to entertain the truth of (7). In other words, propositions which refer to an extensional world are those which are taken as given while propositions which refer to an intensional world are easily, often readily, debated.

Propositions which refer to an alternate world, however, represent a different case. Alternate worlds create an extensional world which is taken for granted within the alternate world-context, and they also create intensional worlds which evaluate the propositions of the alternate/extensional world. But here the truth-value of these propositions is determined by a belief, or a "willing suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge: Chapter 14), and not by the

empirical procedures which would normally apply in the phenomenal world. Let us consider Diagram I which characterizes the relationship between the phenomenal, extensional, intensional and alternate worlds.

Diagram I



Here, we can see that an interesting characteristic of an alternate world is that it appears to supersede the boundary which normally divides the extensional world from the intensional. The significance of this feature, especially as it applies to literary texts, will become more apparent later, but first, let us incorporate the notion of extensional, intensional and alternate worlds into a

taxonomy of text perception. At a gross level, this taxonomy will provide an explanation for the ability of subjects to distinguish between literary and nonliterary language, but it may also provide some insight into the problematic areas of text interpretation and literary evaluation as well.

Perception I (PI) exists in an environment of texts which refer to a set of compatible extensional worlds. Some common examples of texts which may take the extensional world as their explicit referent are business correspondence, contractual language, conversational discourse, nonliterary narratives and the like.

Perception II (PII) exists in the environment of texts which take as their referent a set of compatible intensional worlds which are used to conceptualize some aspect of the extensional world. Examples of such texts would be much scientific literature and many of the articles which we find in scholarly journals. Perception II would not only account for works of literary criticism but also works concerning quantum mechanics, blackhole phenomena and linguistic theory, just to mention a few.

Perception III (PIII) exists in an environment of texts which take an alternate world as their referent. Following Levin (pp. 115-119) it would seem that such alternate worlds are recognized through the "implicit context" created by the performative

8) I imagine (myself in) and invite you to conceive a world in which . . . (Levin: p. 116).

Those texts which we perceive as referring to an alternate world constitute the literature of a culture.

Perception IV (PIV) exists in an environment of texts which are a subset of PIII. Like PIII, PIV is recognized through the implicit performative represented by (8), but in this case, the reader believes or prefers the predicate of (8). The reader's perception of texts which refer to an alternate world (PIII) is dominated by the propositional attitude

9) I know of a world in which . . .

While texts which refer to alternate worlds which are believed or preferred correspond to a reader's perception which is dominated by the propositional attitude

10) I believe (or prefer) a world in which . . .

Both PIII and PIV will contain the texts which will be perceived as the literature of a culture; however, all those texts which refer to alternate worlds which are known but not preferred should be considered as secondary literary texts while those which are both known and preferred should be considered as the primary literary texts of a culture (Crodian, 1977, 1978a, and 1978b). For example, the avid reader of Raymond Chandler who read Shakespeare with great

reluctance in high school would recognize both The Long Goodbye and Richard II as literature, but the former would be considered a primary literary text and the latter only a secondary one.

Of course, when attempting a more rigorous specification of Perceptions I-IV we are immediately confronted with the problem of how to make an empirical correlation between particular text features and particular text perceptions. Furthermore, the question of what kind of data constitutes proof of a particular text perception is in itself an interesting problem. However, I can make a few observations which indicate that these hypotheses about text perceptions warrant further study. For example, we expect our home mortgage to refer to the extensional world and not some planet existing only in a science fiction novel, and conversely, we have little difficulty in recognizing the conjectural, or intensional, status of most political tracts.

When trying to isolate the empirical correlates between text features and the perception of an alternate world, I am on a bit firmer ground because not only can I appeal to our intuitions, but also I can identify some text features which conjure an alternate world. For example, narrative texts which present third person descriptions like

11) He hoped that the train would be on time.

indicate that the text's referent is an alternate world where the narrator has the power to read minds. Another instance is the long standing poetic convention of the persona invoking supernatural aid for his endeavors. Similar to this are the hyperbolic displays of emotion like Shelley's "I fall upon the thorn's of life! I bleed!" which indicate that the persona is in some visionary, trancelike or otherworldly state.

There are many more examples, of course, like the mentioning of fantastic personages and the occurrence of fantastic events, and with further study, we should be able to extend our knowledge of text features which encourage or necessitate the conjuring of an alternate world. However, at this stage of our study, it may be more important to organize these observations into a hypothesis which seeks to explain literary phenomena.

Levin has argued that in deviant expressions like

12) The stone died.

some semantic marker is changed so that the expression can be construed to have meaning in the phenomenal world. In contrast to (12), metaphoric expressions like

13) I saw eternity the other night.

cause an alternate world to be constructed such that (13) has truth-conditions. Thus, in the case of (12), the

expression is changed to fit the phenomenal world, and in (13), the world is changed to fit the expression.

These hypotheses give us an excellent tool for understanding the semantics and pragmatics of deviant and metaphoric expressions, but this emphasis on the meaning and truth-conditions of deviant expressions may detract from the importance in literature of the alternate value-systems created by deviant expressions. The term, value, is being used here in the relational as opposed to its objective sense--i.e. value is seen as "a relationship . . . that arises out of circumstances linking the value-object with the valuing subject in some way" (Rescher: p. 55).

This relational notion of value coupled with Levin's idea of phenomenalistic construal allows an interesting speculation about the function of literature in a culture. Phenomenalistic construal accounts for the fact that the reader "transports" himself into the alternate world of the literary text wherein he might take quite literally all "novel, strange, alien, 'impossible' objects, events and actions" (1977: p. 131-2). Given our relational definition of value, then, it would seem that an alternate world must also present at least one new, or alternate, relationship between a value-object and a valuing subject, and consequently, an alternate world must also be imbued with an alternate value-system. This means, of course, that in the case of phenomenalistic construal, the reader will not only perceive, as literal, entities and events which are

deviant in the phenomenal world, but he will also construe, as literal, the value-system created by this alternate world.

It is important to study literary phenomena from the perspective of alternate value-systems for at least two reasons. First, as is indicated in diagram I, the epistemic boundary between the extensional world and the intensional world is superseded by the alternate world. Value-systems are a part of the intensional world and thus represent conjectures about the extensional world. However, in the alternate world, the conjectural status of intensional world propositions is greatly reduced and possibly eliminated. In effect, this means that in the alternate world-context there is little, if no, boundary between extensional and intensional worlds, and thus value-systems revealed in literature have an undisputed validity which is not possessed by value-systems of the phenomenal world.

A second reason is that although alternate value-systems cannot be challenged within the alternate world-context, they are very much open for debate when they are measured against the phenomenal world. It is the feasibility or preferability of the alternate value-system in the phenomenal world which allows the reader to decide whether a particular work is a primary or a secondary literary text. By studying the text features or relationships which distinguish primary literary texts from secondary ones, we may learn more about the role of conceptual hierarchies in literary evaluation, and such studies could possibly set the

stage for revealing analyses of both the psychology and the sociology of literature.

Finally, then, within the context of the hypotheses stated above, the study of literary language assumes at least two potentially interesting directions. The first is the description and explanation of how linguistic structures refer to alternate worlds. The second is the description of alternate value-systems coupled with an explanation of how they function as sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic phenomena. Both problems present a challenge to the language theorist, but my final contention is that the harder puzzle always presents the opportunity for the more illuminating solution.

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